



### Older adults' frequent visits to a *fast-food* restaurant

#### Nonobligatory social interaction and the significance of play

Michael Cheang studied a group of older adults at a fast food restaurant in Honolulu. Before he was able to begin the study, he obtained permission from the manager under the conditions that he 1) appear to be a paying customer, 2) not conduct any formal interviews or surveys on the premises, and 3) not interfere with the flow of business.

Cheang spent the first two weeks simply observing the behaviour of the regular customers. He focused on a specific group of about 26 adults, one of the larger groupings that came there frequently and was diverse with regard to gender and age.

Cheang sat at a table and eventually began talking to one of the group members. The participant introduced him to other people in the group. They were friendly, but at first viewed him as an outsider. He showed up every Tuesday and Thursday, and sometimes Friday, and soon became part of the group.

He observed the group in the setting for 2 or 3 days a week for 9 months. His notes were narrative in quality as he retold the adults' stories. By the 5th month, several themes of behavior and experiences emerged: sociability, play, and laughter. Findings suggest that: (a) older adults congregate at this fast-food restaurant to be with their buddies "to play"; (b) the group is fun for members and there are lots of laughter; and (c) group membership in this restaurant provides structure, meaning, and opportunities for these older adults to engage in personal expression.

In month 6 he shared his observations and the themes with group members, and interviewed them with regard to their perceptions of the themes that were generated from his field notes.

*Cheang, Michael (2002), "Older Adults' Frequent Visits to a Fast-Food Restaurant: Nonobligatory Social Interaction and the Significance of Play in a Third Place," Journal of Aging Studies, 16 (August), 303-21.*

## Questions

Please answer all of the following questions with direct reference to the study above.

1. What type of observation was used in the above study? What is **one** strength and **one** limitation of this type of study?
2. Discuss how the Michael Cheang analyzed his notes? What type of coding did he use? Why do you think that he used this type of coding?
3. Discuss the ethical considerations of carrying out this type of study?
4. Why did Michael Cheang carry out the interviews at the end of the study?